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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VILNIUS 000104

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [RS](#) [LH](#)

SUBJECT: LITHUANIA: FOREIGN MINISTER HINTS AT RUSSIAN HAND  
BEHIND KGB SCANDAL

REF: VILNIUS 52

Classified By: Ambassador Steve Mull; Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

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1. (C) Foreign Minister Valionis told Ambassador Mull January 27 he suspects Russian special services are behind recent public charges that he and State Security Department (VSD) chief Pocius had obscured past KGB links. Valionis, citing reports of Russian unhappiness over his recent role in thwarting Russian interests here, said the Russian operation probably intends to drive the two from office. Nevertheless, he is confident a parliamentary inquiry will exonerate them both. Valionis's theory is plausible, but internal coalition politics could also be at the root of his recent troubles. The case is likely to arouse anti-Russian feelings through the next several months, even as Lithuanians emotionally grapple with World War II commemorations in Moscow May 9. In any case, Valionis's and Pocius's track records of vigilance against Russian influence and their friendship to U.S. interests tend to undermine the charges' validity. End Summary.

Revenge?

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2. (C) Valionis invited the Ambassador for a private meeting to convey a congratulatory message to Secretary Rice (septel), reaffirm Lithuania's commitment to lead a PRT in western Afghanistan, and discuss the recent charges against him. (Note: As reported septel, earlier in January, a right-wing Lithuanian publication "Atgimimo" (Rebirth) had published reports that he and Pocius had obscured their past service in the KGB reserve in the 1980's. Lithuania's parliament established a commission in mid-January to review the charges and make recommendations. Valionis claimed he had provided a full accounting of his KGB reserve experience before his appointment as Ambassador to Poland in 1994; Pocius, after claiming to be unaware of being listed on KGB reserves, later admitted it. End note.)

3. (C) Valionis said he had learned definitively that an obscure source had paid the magazine to run the article against him and Pocius, but that he had not yet learned who had paid to place it. Although admitting he had no concrete proof, Valionis said a number of factors lead him to suspect that the charges are part of a Russian intelligence operation that aims to exact revenge:

--Russian Duma Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Rogozin had a difficult meeting with Valionis during the former's visit to Lithuania in January 2003 over Russia's request to establish a transport corridor to Kaliningrad. Valionis said sources close to former President Paksas had told him that Paksas, then President-elect, and his foreign policy adviser Alvydas Medalinskas had promised Rogozin they would find a way to drive Valionis from office. (Note: Medalinskas throughout the Paksas presidency went to great lengths to antagonize and embarrass Valionis, who gave back as good as he got. End note.) Valionis showed the Ambassador what appeared to be a third country report describing Rogozin's comments to the Russian government after the trip that Valionis was confrontational and hostile to Russian interests.

--Valionis had heard from European sources about continued Russian complaints over the past two years about Valionis's intransigence in opposing Russian efforts to secure a transport corridor to Kaliningrad.

--Valionis had played an active role, with Pocius, in engineering the expulsion of several Russian diplomats from Lithuania in 2004 for espionage.

--Russian sources had indicated to Valionis that Russian Baltic watchers had hoped parliamentary elections in October and the subsequent change in government would result in his removal from office. His return to the foreign ministry in December for a new term, he believes, prompted Russian special services to launch the new attacks in order to drive him from office.

4. (C) Valionis, displaying a personal photographic archive

of his active role in Lithuania's independence movement, dismissed allegations of his concealed relationship as false.

He noted he had declared his reserve status at the outset of his government service in 1994, and said he welcomed the parliamentary commission as an opportunity to exonerate him.

Comment: Not To Worry

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15. (C) Valionis's theory of Russian manipulation is certainly plausible, given the large Russian intelligence presence in Lithuania and the ease of planting stories in the country's fractious, undisciplined media. But there could be other factors -- Lithuania's new coalition government has gotten off to a rocky start with sniping among the partners, and there remains considerable hostility towards the foreign minister from former President Paksas's supporters. Whoever is behind the charges, we believe any fear that Valionis and Pocius are somehow compromised by any past association with the KGB is unwarranted. Both officials have strong track records of defending Lithuania against Russian interference and have been strong backers of tight relations with the U.S. Regardless of who masterminded the campaign against the two officials and why, the story is certain to provoke anti-Russian feelings in a political scene already in turmoil about whether President Adamkus should participate in World War II commemorative events in Moscow on May 9. That will make a constructive relationship with Russia in the months ahead regrettably all the harder to maintain.

MULL